

ETF Policy on Training and Recruitment in Maritime Transport

- **Regulation is required to stabilise and encourage a sustainable maritime industry within Europe and to promote both the recruitment and the retention of a highly skilled EU workforce willing to take up careers in the European maritime cluster**

To achieve the above-mentioned goal, there is a need to regulate the European maritime transport sector as far as manning conditions on board EU flagged vessels are concerned, and in particular intra-EU trades, and adapt and further develop the existing Community regulatory framework on State Aid Guidelines (SAG) for maritime transport.

Through the ETF Recruitment and Training Project, the ETF investigated whether SAG, as revised in 2004 by the Commission, succeeded to meet the fundamental objective, i.e. “to maintain and improve maritime know-how and protect and promote employment for European seafarers”. It was demonstrated that existing State aid, both in the form of fiscal incentives – such as the tonnage tax and labour cost subsidies and reduction of wage taxes for instance – have had too little impact on training and employment of European nationals. Against this background, there is a strong case for closing loopholes in the way such fiscal incentives are utilized. **The ETF calls on the Commission to take advantage of the 2011 review of SAG for allowing the granting of subsidies on condition that aid recipients demonstrate that EU taxpayers’ money is resulting in job opportunities for EU nationals, for both ratings and officers, and more training (including more cadet berths)**

Moreover, if the EU is serious about boosting EU employment in shipping, **a new Community initiative is needed, in the form of a revamped legislative proposal on manning conditions, to ensure a level playing field is set for all seafarers working on or engaged in exclusive and regular trade in the EU, irrespective of the nationality of the seafarers or the flag of registration of the vessel.** This issue needs to be taken up seriously at European level, by the EU Commission, if the downwards spiral in salaries and discriminatory practices on grounds of nationality and/or place of residence or flag of registration is to be stopped, as it is too often the case in regular passenger and ferry services operating between Member States.

Finally, **the exclusion of seafarers from the scope of some EU labour and social Directives must be ended.** Seagoing workers should be put on an equal footing with land-based workers and derogation regimes should be repealed.

- **The alleged myth of a fundamental lack of attractiveness of seafaring professions amongst Europeans has to be questioned as it hides a more serious and complex problem**

Although we cannot be complacent about the issue of the attractiveness of seafaring professions (erosion of public awareness of shipping, factors such as criminalization of seafarers, piracy, the restriction to shore leave, isolation, fatigue, difficult working and living conditions, etc.), the ETF Project found that a substantial number of maritime academies tend to have more applicants than slots available. Furthermore, it is also shown that the few companies that do train turn down many more applicants than the limited number of places they can offer. **The real problem is not a shortage of bright and able EU recruits but rather a shortage of training opportunities and committed shipowners ready to offer training, secure employment and on-going careers.**

Media and awareness-raising campaigns about opportunities available in the maritime industry are useful but not sufficient in solving the problem of the attractiveness of a career in shipping. **Image campaigns need to be accompanied by appropriate ship-board training and recruitment policies which equally enhance skills for all categories of seafarers; especially targeting ratings and junior officers.** Moreover, more and better efforts should be undertaken to render the seafaring profession attractive to women. The shipping industry still lags behind many other industries in terms of reaching out to women and we believe this should be a matter of the highest priority for the maritime industry (see below).

Furthermore, Shipping companies' policies have contributed to undermine the seafaring profession in recent decades. In effect, there has been a continued decline in the traditional pattern of seafarers working directly for shipping companies, i.e. drift to offshore terms and conditions or employment through remotely located third party employers locate outside the EU. What is more, the casualised nature of agency work has created fundamental shifts in attitude among masters and officers such as disenchantment with such employment relationships, pay reviews often made on a "take it or leave it" basis. **A fundamental change in attitude amongst shipping companies is therefore needed so as to increase the attractiveness of the maritime profession through improved Human Resources' Management.**

- **Greater effort must be galvanised to promote better training; facilitate the entry to the profession; and enhance continuous career development with a view to promoting mutual recognition and professional mobility**

There is a need to develop the exchange on best practices between maritime training and education institutes in order to create maritime education systems that are more reflective and adaptable to new emerging skill needs of the maritime industry.

European seafarers, ratings and officers, must be equipped with clear career perspectives, quality initial and vocational training, and life-long learning schemes relevant for both the

seafaring professions and the EU maritime cluster. Shipping companies must be encouraged to finance the studies of future seafarers. In addition, there is an absolute necessity to create an environment facilitating the recruitment and training of ratings and when possible, their progression from ratings to officers.

Based on the project's finding, ETF suggests the examination of the merits for more flexible and blended modes of learning for both the initial education and continuous career development and lifelong learning. Maritime education could thus focus more on general management issues, including commercial and business management, and an equal attention could be paid to both sector specific skills and transferable skills. Furthermore, the concept of "STCW +" is worthy of further consideration specifically with regards to what might flow a scheme that encourages Member States to train seafarers beyond the minimum requirements of the STCW.

The incentives and training should centre on an EU wide recognised seafarer-training certificate and a guarantee of employment following graduation. To this end, EU funds should be deployed to support education and training institutions as well as national governments and social partners in promoting innovative, modern and up to date training schemes and with the ultimate aim of facilitating the entrance of a pool of motivated and skilled seafarers in the EU shipping industry. The use of available Structural Funds to these aims should be facilitated and encouraged by the Commission.

Furthermore, shipping companies should allocate sufficient training berths to allow cadets to complete their qualifications and enhance their employment opportunities. Without access to training berths, potential seafarers are not able to gain the required amount of sea-time training and ultimately, to utilise their academic qualifications in the job market. Therefore, the ETF calls on shipping companies to allocate an appropriate number of training berths for trainees so as to facilitate the completion of their training period and the entrance into the seafaring labour market. The Commission should ensure that there are no obstacles to shipowners maximising trainee berths e.g. the TM Convention.

- **Making the shipping industry more friendly to women and enhancing female seafarers' recruitment**

The project revealed that women were found to be often discriminated in accessing the profession compared to their male colleagues. What is more, many reasons were found that have prevented women from embarking on a career at sea and possible solutions to overcome such impediments have been suggested. **Therefore, working patterns should be arranged so as to allow a better reconciliation of working and family life i.e. through for instance better access to parental leave and alternation of time spent at sea and on ashore.** Equally, investigations revealed that on board facilities, such as accommodation, sanitary facilities or recreational activities are not fit for women and need to be substantially improved. In addition, determined efforts should be made to eradicate bullying and harassment towards female seafarers which have been too often reported.

- **The improvement of on board working and living conditions can play a major role in boosting the attractiveness of the seafaring profession and its ability to retain European seafarers**
More effective controls are needed to tackle fatigue which is often linked to inadequate manning on board vessels. **The ETF calls on the EU policy makers to enforce adequate crew complements and prevent unfair competition through relaxed interpretation of international standards.**

As far as on board communications facilities are concerned, **ETF calls on shipping companies to invest on the access to and use of advanced information technologies** so as to promote better personal communication means for seafarers, i.e. developing technologies for broadband communication suitable for short sea shipping and allowing seafarers to access internet while at sea.

The promotion of e-learning possibilities aimed at improving seafarers' skills should be considered.

- **There is a compelling need for European governments to both ratify and enforce the ILO Maritime Labour Convention, 2006**
Whilst the MLC is not a panacea for the problems of the shipping industry it does represent an opportunity to establish minimum standards and safeguards with a view to promoting a level playing field regarding on board working and living conditions – thus making the seafaring career more attractive. Member States must therefore support the seafarers' "Bill of Rights" and devote the necessary resources to enable on-going programmes of Flag and Port State Control inspections to ensure the MLC's provisions are properly enforced.
- **The improvement of the legal and administrative treatment of seafarers can have a positive effect on the recruitment and retention of European seafarers**
The issue of criminalisation has to be seriously addressed as this increasing phenomenon may have far-reaching implications on the willingness of Europeans to embark on a shipping career. **The ETF demands the widespread adoption of both the IMO/ILO Guidelines on the Fair Treatment of Seafarers in the Event of a Maritime Accident and the IMO Code for the Investigation of Marine Casualties and Incidents.** However, this is not the solution – more respect for the maritime profession is essential at all levels - and ultimately mandatory provisions beyond just guidelines for marine accidents are required.

Equally important is the need to provide seafarers with adequate shore leave. The interest of European seafarers in considering a shipping career would be significantly enhanced in case such a fundamental right would be recognised more widely. **There is a need for a concerted drive to ratify and enforce the ILO Convention 185 on Seafarers' ID and all relevant EU Institutions must encourage Member States in that respect.**

- **More efforts at both EU and Member States level are to be made to strengthen the maritime clustering process and ensure seafaring continues to provide related industries with skilled manpower**

The recruitment of European seafarers and enhanced training towards higher qualifications are in the longer term interest of both the direct European shipping industry and the wider maritime cluster. A reduced number of experienced seafarers (ratings and officers) will lead to labour shortages in maritime cluster industries requiring seafaring expertise or accepting imperfect substitute qualifications when seafaring experience would be preferred.

- **The ETF calls on the Commission to develop an information system providing reliable and coherent data on maritime employment in Europe**

Given the size of the Maritime Cluster and the shore based employment that is a direct result of the shipping industry in the EU 27, the lack of consistent and reliable data on the numbers of seafarers employed is lamentable and must be addressed. There is therefore an urgent need for the establishment of an official European database, including information on employment demand/supply, training, qualifications, recruitment practices and retention, amongst others. This is essential if policy decision making is to be enhanced and have the desired outcomes.

ETF calls on the Commission to require that Members States competent administrations collect and make the above-mentioned data available, while paying a particular attention on the comparability of the information collected. The statistical office of the European Union EUROSTAT, as well as the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) could also be involved in such exercise.

Finally the ETF would like to make it clear that the availability of comparable data should eventually support policy development at EU level.